

IMPORTANT CHINESE ART

AUCTION IN HONG KONG
3 OCTOBER 2018
SALE HK0818
3 PM

TRAVELLING EXHIBITION

1 – 2 September
Shanghai
St Regis Jing-An, Astor Ballroom 1

4 – 5 September
Beijing
Park Hyatt Beijing, Ballroom 3

15-16 September
Taipei
Hua Nan Bank International Convention Centre

EXHIBITION

Friday 28 September
10am - 5:30pm

Saturday 29 September
10am – 8pm

Sunday 30 September
10am – 8pm

Monday 1 October
10am – 6:30pm

Tuesday 2 October
10am – 6:30 pm

Hall 1
Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre
(New Wing)
1 Expo Drive Wanchai Hong Kong



A RARE HIGH-WAISTED HUANGHUALI LUOHAN CHUANG

CURTIS EVARTS

Twenty-five years ago, a collector asked me to evaluate a *huanghuali luohan chuang* that he had been offered in Hong Kong. After making arrangements to see the piece, I was guided to a small storage facility located on a narrow side street just off Hollywood Road. Interestingly, the *chuang* was completely disassembled in pieces that were laid out on the floor. Nonetheless, after looking over the various components, it was apparent that it was a high-waisted form with cabriole legs, and the railings were of an unusual style fitted with plinth-like bases. Without the proper tools to assemble the entire piece, I could only loosely place legs together with the apron, waist elements, and railings to get sense of the overall proportion (**fig. 1**). At that time, I recognised a unique form with excellent workmanship; and not only was it in original condition with undisturbed surfaces, there didn't seem to be a single piece missing! Understandably, my collector did not hesitate to acquire the piece. A few years later in 1999, we selected this *chuang* to be included in the exhibition and catalogue *Splendor of Style: Classical Chinese Furniture from the Ming and Qing Dynasties* organised by the National

Museum of History, Taipei. Now, after all these years, I have been given another opportunity to review this rare high-waisted *huanghuali luohan chuang*. The following article will explore a few of its unique characteristics.

Although the high-waist pattern is often associated with various types of cabriole-leg furniture, *luohan chuangs* of high-waisted form are very rare. Many cabriole-leg stands and stools are of high-waisted style. And it was also a standard convention for the canopy bed; such is the iconic moon-gate canopy bed in the Palace Museum collection, which also features relief-carved floral panels set between short vertical struts shaped as bamboo (**fig. 2**). This general construction pattern – with plain or decorative *taohuan* panels separated with short struts that rest upon additional (*tuosai*) moulding – can be considered an archaistic style associated with the ancient *xumi* pedestal platform. Nevertheless, most *luohan chuangs* are fashioned with the streamlined narrow waist. But when the high waist is adapted to the form as with the Sotheby's piece, the overall style approaches the dignity of a throne chair.



fig. 1
Detail of lot 3621 *huanghuali luohan chuang* components, photo taken by author, October 1993.

圖一
拍品編號3621黃花梨羅漢床構件 筆者攝於1993年10月



fig. 2
Detail of *huanghuali* moon gate canopy bed, Ming dynasty
Image Courtesy of Palace Museum, Beijing.

圖二
明 黃花梨月洞門架子床牙板腿足局部
圖片鳴謝：北京故宮博物院







fig. 3

Detail of Nine Dragons Screen Wall, Datong, Ming dynasty, Hongwu period, photo taken by author, 1998.

圖三

明洪武 大同九龍壁局部 筆者攝於1998年

The stylistic variation of a high waist with narrow decorative (*taohuan*) panels separated with bamboo-shaped struts is a relatively early convention that pre-dates the Ming period. Amongst architectural relics, stone column bases with such ornamentation are found amongst Song and Yuan dynasty constructions. And the Nine Dragons Screen Wall at Datong, which was constructed for the residence of the emperor Hongwu's 13th son (Prince Zhu Gui) in 1392, also reveals this well-established decorative pattern adapted to the standards of imperial architecture. Made of glazed pottery tiles, the lower section of the screen has two long rows of rectangular panels depicting auspicious dragons and other mythical beasts, and each is separated with short bamboo-shaped pillars (**fig. 3**). This early architectural decorative style was also adapted as furniture-making technique and often appears in high-waisted constructions. Such is the Sotheby's *luohan chuang*, which also feature auspicious *chi* dragons decorating the high-waist panels.

Amongst hardwood *luohan chuangs*, the railings of this piece are also of unique style. The bottom of the railings are fitted with an architectural plinth-like base, and the side railings terminate with decorative standing spandrels. Although the plinth base is rare for hardwood *chuangs*, the technique was common to lacquer constructions during the Ming period. The Palace Museum collection houses two such examples including a gold-filled *tianqi* lacquer *chuang* with a Chongzhen period inscription dated to 1631 (**fig. 4**) as well as a black lacquer *chuang* with mother-of-pearl inlay decoration; similar railings on other Ming dynasty lacquer *chuangs* belonging to private collections are also known. The plinth base provides a secure ground for the railing as well as a visually pleasing transition from the narrow panel to the massive base. And similar to the railings on the Chongzhen period *luohan chuang*, the side panels of the Sotheby's *huanghuali luohan chuang* also terminate with bracket-like standing spandrels with round open work *chi* dragon motifs (**see opposite page**). Thus, this *huanghuali* piece clearly borrows its pattern from the earlier lacquer furniture tradition, and it also incorporates the decorative carving techniques that flourished throughout the late Ming and early Qing periods when hardwood furniture was in its relatively early stage of development.

The carved decoration is unified around a central theme of winged *chi* dragons and luxuriant flowering grass. Advancing *chi* dragons appear on front and side waist panels (**see pp. 132-133**) as well as coiled embryonic forms within the side rail terminal spandrels. *Chi* dragons were popular decoration

during the Warring States period and Han dynasty. Illustrations of ancient jades published in Yuan and Ming dynasty texts often depict *chi* dragons (c.f. **fig. 5**), which may have well inspired wood carving artisans during the late Ming period. *Chi* dragons are an immature form said to be offspring from the Nine Dragons; *chi* dragons with wings are an even more distinguished breed, and may perhaps intimate the rise of a majestic winged *ying* dragon. In this regard, the theme of winged *chi* dragons on this *huanghuali* piece may also indicate an association with an aspiring official, or perhaps even with a princeling of imperial rank.

Further indication of the quality of this piece is also evidenced in the attention given to the waist panels across the back side, which are typically undecorated; each is carved in relief with an abstract begonia-shaped (*haitangshi*) motif; and although a secondary pattern not intended to be seen, even here the rhythmic lines pulse with life (**see pp. 138-139**).

Across the front, the deep curvilinear apron is carved with luxuriant scrolling grasses flowering with *lingzhi* blossoms; fresh growth also sprouts out along the ends of the apron and the scrolled feet of the powerful cabriole legs. Aside from unity of motifs, the carving is unified throughout in its animated style and robust vitality, reflecting the work of a single master.

Relative to dating, this piece can be attributed to the 17th century. The animated carving style of *chi* dragons, fragrant grass, and *lingzhi* belongs to this transitional period, and as noted above, the form also exhibits technique from the initial era when hardwood furniture makers were employing technique from the earlier lacquer furniture tradition.

With these various components completely reassembled, the whole piece exhibits a robust, yet compact form that stands on powerful cabriole legs. The platform-style base exhibits the enduring tradition associated with ancient architecture. Simultaneously, the enclosing railings reach outward with gentle flowing lines marking ease and congeniality. And the naturally vivid decoration enhancing both base and railings is exquisitely integrated and unified with the overall form. Such cultivated balance recalls the Confucian adage, "If it is all substance without ornamentation, then it is rustic and unrefined. If it is all ornamentation without substance, then it is superficial like superficial trade. But when ornamentation and substance are duly blended, then it is imbued with mannered propriety." The latter – considered the gentle yet principled characteristics of the Confucian official – are also clearly reflected in this unique *huanghuali luohan chuang*.







黃花梨高束腰羅漢床

柯惕思

廿五載前，得藏家之託，余赴香港鑑評一幢黃花梨羅漢床，沿荷里活道邊窄巷蜿蜒來到一小型倉庫，見到羅漢床時，其已拆解於地。細觀之，覺其為高束腰、三彎腿，圍子形制特殊，下飾階級式臺座。當時未帶工具組裝，僅能約略排置各部元素，以窺大概（圖一）。其工藝細緻妙絕，獨一無二，保存完整，竟無一處佚失！如此稀珍，遂得藏家保藏。1999年，吾等擇其借展台北國立歷史博物館《風華再現：明清家具收藏展》。今日，欣能為此珍罕黃花梨高束腰羅漢床再撰專文，詳探其獨特之處。

傳統家具中，高束腰多搭配三彎腿，如香几一類，然高束腰羅漢床極為罕見。傳統上高束腰多見於架子床，例如北京故宮博物院藏黃花梨月洞式門罩架子床，束腰作竹節間隔浮雕花卉紋飾（圖二）。繚環板或光素、或有紋，間段以短柱相隔，下有托腮，乃仿古式風格，取材須彌座。羅漢床多作流線束腰，然類同現例之高束腰者，愈顯尊貴，宛若寶座。

高束腰搭配窄繚環板，間以竹節狀短柱相隔，源自明前，宋元二朝建築遺跡可見石柱底部作類同紋飾。大同九龍壁



建於明洪武二十五年（1392年），為明太祖第十三子帶王朱桂之居處所造，其紋飾、設計採宮廷建築典制，整體以釉燒陶片組成，九龍壁下部飾二長列祥龍、瑞獸，間以短竹節相隔（圖三）。此類建築裝飾，亦衍用於家具製作，多用作高束腰式家具，一如本品，高束腰繚環板雕繚螭龍，祥瑞非凡。

此羅漢床圍子，風格獨特，異於其他硬木作例。圍子底端接方形台座，側面圍子末端作鏤雕紋飾，前者多見於明代漆製家具，參考北京故宮博物院藏二例，其一明崇禎填漆

戩金龍紋羅漢床（圖四），銘文紀年1631年，另一為黑漆嵌螺鈿花鳥紋羅漢床。此外，私人收藏明代漆製羅漢床，亦可見類同圍子形式。圍子底接方形台座不僅加固結構，亦提供造形線條上自細至廣的過渡，更顯端雅。本次蘇富比拍賣之黃花梨羅漢床與前者相似，側圍二端接鏤雕螭龍飾板（見頁130）。由此可知，此床造形取材漆作傳統，融合明末清初臻熟雕刻技術，成就此早期硬木家具傑作。

黃花梨羅漢床紋以螭龍、芝草紋為主紋飾，前、二側繚環板綴帶翼螭龍翔游（見頁132-133局部），圍子二端鏤作



fig. 4

Detail of *qiangjin* and *tianqi* lacquer *luohan chuang*, Ming dynasty, Chongzhen period, dated in accordance with 1631
Image Courtesy of Palace Museum, Beijing.

圖四

明崇禎 鍍金填漆雲龍紋羅漢床 《大明崇禎辛未年製》款

圖片鳴謝：北京故宮博物院



fig. 5

Line drawing of jade scabbard from *Gu yu tu* [Illustrations of ancient jades], Yuan dynasty.

圖五

元 《古玉圖》內之螭龍紋玉琕線描圖

環形螭紋。螭龍紋盛行於戰國時期至漢朝，元明時期出版之高古玉圖考，時可見之（圖五），應或影響晚明木雕風格。螭乃龍生九子傳說中之幼龍，螭龍有翼或為應龍雛形。此黃花梨羅漢床飾有翼螭龍紋，寓意平步高陞，加官進爵。

羅漢床背面鮮為示人，多呈光素無紋，然此例背面之束腰亦見雕琢，綴海棠式浮雕，線條洋溢動感，靈活有力（見頁138-139局部）。

正面牙條雕綴芝草紋，三彎腿卷足亦飾嫩芽紋，紋飾線條靈動自然，生機蓬勃，整體風格和諧一致，應出自同一能匠巧手。

綜觀黃花梨羅漢床特徵，應造於十七世紀，螭龍、香草、靈芝紋飾風格屬明末清初，其特殊形制得早期漆作家具影響，屬硬木家具發展初期之珍例。

黃花梨高束腰羅漢床，簡雅有力，三彎腿造形予其健碩精煉之感，卷足反映其與古建築傳統密切關聯，圍子二端巧作流線更添柔和舒適。週身紋飾自然生動，巧妙融入整體造形，虛實之間達到絕佳平衡，即如儒家所倡，楊雄《法言：修身》曰：「實無華則野，華無實則賈，華實副則禮」，謂中庸之道，明確體現於此獨一無二之黃花梨羅漢床。





